

# Informational Notes for Local Officials

Bulletin #1 - October 16, 2001

## The Threat & General Terrorism Information

### Terrorism Information

Because terrorism events may take many forms, it is difficult to offer specific tips or information guidance that is germane to each possibility. In view of that however, the information contained in this bulletin is intended to convey information that may be useful to local officials as they consider steps to enhance the understanding and readiness of the community.

### Funding

Not surprisingly so, many local governments have asked if SEMA has special funds available to assist them in their preparation / vigilance against terrorist threats. The short answer is - no, not at this time. We do not know if the future holds any such promise, but be assured we will share any and all information in this regard.

### Bio-terrorism

Historically, biological agents have not been the weapon of choice for terrorists. Since 1995, only 13 fatalities are attributed to such agents while over 6,000 deaths have been caused by conventional devices such as bombs and airline hijackings. That is the past; we do not know precisely what the future holds.

What should communities and residents do to prepare for a possible biological incident? **Some of the best and most practical recommendations sound much like past advice from any disaster - with some exceptions. *Pause. Take a deep breath. Calm down. Do not however become complacent.*** The possibility of such attacks are real and daily vigilance for activities beyond the ordinary should be cause for attention.

Experts agree that the gas mask idea is not an effective preparatory measure. Anthrax is an airborne agent that must be breathed into the body. Once the spores are in the body they cannot be exhaled. Flu like symptoms can be early signs of this agent. Any such situation should be diagnosed by proper medical authorities. Contact your local health officials for more information.

### Public Health Guidance for Anthrax Threat Letters or Packages

This guidance is being issued under separate cover. Specific guidance for this threat is currently being formulated with the appropriate agencies. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is assisting in this effort. Very soon specific guidance will be made available to you. In the meantime, the best advice is to contact local police and health facilities for assistance.

## Protective “Gas” Masks

Many questions have been asked about the use of gas masks. Today, the uncertainty of type, locations and scope of terrorism acts, **it is not appropriate for large scale usage of gas masks.** Masks do not provide protection against ALL forms of possible damaging gases. An individual would have to carry and possibly wear the mask at all times to be certain of protection - certainly a negative factor. Masks are not available for large masses of the public at this time.

## Conventional Explosives (Bombs)

Historically this has been the weapon of choice for terrorists. Suicide bombers have been active in other parts of the world for decades. This country may also experience this threat from “sleeper” terrorist cells known to be in the U.S. “Be alert to the unusual” remains good advice to deter this threat.

Other measures that can be taken are as follows:

- \* **Limit access to places of public gatherings** - one entrance verses multiple auxiliary entrances.
- \* **Control public parking** - keep vehicles away from facilities to the extent possible.
- \* **If appropriate, security personnel** should observe people entering the facilities.

## Conventional Bomb Threats

Bombs can be constructed to look like almost anything and can be delivered in any number of ways. Most bombs are homemade and are limited in their design only by the imagination of or resources available to the bomber.

When searching for a bomb, suspect anything that looks unusual. Let a trained bomb technician determine what is or is not a bomb. A bomb threat is usually delivered in one of two ways:

- \* **The most popular method is by use of telephone.**
- \* **The second method is usually associated with a generalized threat** and extortion attempts, involving a written message. Regardless of either situation, these threats could be serious and should never be ignored.

## Telephone Threats

Both bomb threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) threats may be phoned in. Follow the suggestions below when dealing for either event.

\* **Keep the caller on the line as long as possible.** Ask him/her to repeat the message. Record every word spoken by the person.

\* If the caller does not indicate the location of the bomb/WMD device or the time of possible detonation/contamination, **ask him/her for this information.**

\* **Pay particular attention to background noises**, such as motors running, music playing and any other noise which may give a clue as to the location of the caller.

\* **Report the information immediately to the local law enforcement agency**, Missouri State Highway Patrol, local police, fire department, ATF, FBI or other appropriate agencies. Remain available so law enforcement can interview you.

## **Sheltering**

\* **Designated Shelter** - for most emergencies which require public sheltering, the local emergency operations plan is the best information source. Your plan should list designated shelters and refer to who has the responsibilities for managing those shelters, i.e., The Red Cross or other local agency. Other shelters have to be found on an emergency basis at the time of the incident. As to “nuclear bomb shelters”, FEMA and SEMA discontinued the designation of public nuclear fallout shelters across the country shortly after the end of the Cold War.

\* **In Place Shelter** - In some cases, advising people to stay indoors and attempting to reduce the air-flow into a structure may be the most effective protective action for Nuclear, Biological, Chemical (NBC) or HazMat events. This type of protection would necessitate local officials communicating with citizens who are located directly in the path of a plume cloud or liquid drainage.

## **Critical Facilities**

Local “critical facilities” should be evaluated by local authorities. In the local emergency operations plan, the types of critical facilities should be listed, i.e., public buildings, hospitals and utilities. For businesses, don’t forget to look at local Tier II sites. Follow your plan!

### **Drinking Water Utilities Can Guard Against Terrorism** reprinted with permission from the American Public Works Assn.

One consequence from September 11, 2001, is the concern over security for public drinking water supply. Over the past few years the drinking water industry, in cooperation with the EPA, has been working to enhance security and protection. Many projects have been underway for several years and are completed or near completion. *The following four categories are recommendations from the American Water Works Associations which can be adapted to any public building or private business:*

#### **1. Guarding Against Unplanned Physical Intrusion**

\* **Lock all doors** and set alarms at your office, drinking water well houses, treatment plants and vaults. Make it a rule that doors are locked and alarms are set.

\* **Limit access to facilities** and control access to water supply reservoirs, giving close scrutiny to visitors and contractors.

\* **Post guards at treatment plants**, and post “Employee Only” signs in restricted areas.

\* **Control access to water supply reservoirs.**

\* **Secure hatches, meter boxes, hydrants, manholes** and other access points to the water distribution system.

\* **Increase lighting in parking lots**, treatment bays, and other areas with limited staffing;

\* **Control access to computer networks and control systems** and change the passwords frequently.

\* **Do not leave keys in equipment or vehicles at any time.**

#### **2. Make Security for Employees a Priority**

\* **Conduct background security checks** at hiring and periodically thereafter.

\***Develop a security program** with written procedures, then train and exercise the

procedures.

- \* **Ensure all employees** are aware of communications protocols with relevant law enforcement, public health, environmental protection and emergency response organizations.

- \* **Ensure employees are vigilant with security** - reporting security breaches, making note of unaccompanied strangers at the site and then notifying law enforcement authorities.

- \* **Consider varying the timing of** operational procedures so that if someone is watching the pattern continually changes.

- \* **Upon dismissal of an employee** change all pass codes and make sure keys and access cards, information are returned to management.

- \* **Provide Customer Service staff** with training and checklists of how to handle a threat.

### **3. Coordinating Actions for Effective Emergency Response**

- \* **Review existing emergency response plans** to ensure they are current and relevant.

- \* **Develop clear protocols and chains-of-command** for reporting and responding to threats.

- \* **Ensure key personnel** (both on and off duty) have access to crucial telephone numbers and contact information at all times. Keep this list up-to-date.

- \* **Develop a close relationship with local law enforcement** and make sure they know where critical assets are located.

- \* **Report to County or State health officials** any illness among the utilities customers that might be associated with water supplies.

- \* **Report criminal threats, suspicious** behavior or attacks on water utilities.

### **4. Investing in Security & Infrastructure Improvements**

- \* **Assess the vulnerability of source water protection areas**, drinking water treatment plants, distribution networks or other key infrastructure elements.

- \* **Move as quickly as possible** with the most obvious and cost-effective physical improvements such as tamper proof manhole covers, fire hydrants, valve boxes.

- \* **Improve computer systems and remote operational security**, seek financing for more expensive and comprehensive improvements if needed.

## **Terrorism Training Offer by SEMA**

SEMA offers a number of courses for local officials, emergency responders and law enforcement personnel. For more information on these courses consult the SEMA training calendar or our web site.